I:Gordon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 ART Khasi ART

plains, jealous of their power, brave in action, and have an aversion to falsehood."

Khasis of the interior who have adopted Christianity are generally cleaner in their persons than the non-Christians, and their women dress better than the latter and have an air of self-respect about them. The houses in a Christian village are also far superior, especially where there are resident European missionaries. Khasis who have become Christians often take to religion with much earnestness (witness the recent religious revival in these hills, which is estimated by the Welsh missionaries to have added between 4,000 and 5,000 converts to Christianity), and are model Sabbatarians, it being a pleasing sight to see men, women, and children trooping to church on a Sunday dressed in their best, and with quite the Sunday expression on their faces one sees in England. It is a pleasure to hear the sound of the distant church bell on the hill-side on a Sunday evening, soon to be succeeded by the beautiful Welsh hymn tunes which, when wafted across the valleys, carry one's thoughts far away. The Welsh missionaries have done, and continue to do, an immense amount of good amongst these people. It would be an evil day for the Khasis if anything should occur to arrest the progress of the mission work in the Khasi Hills.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The Khasis inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, although there are a few Khasi settlers in the neighbouring plains districts. The Census Report of 1901 gives the following figures of Khasi residents in the plains:—

Cachar	333
Sylhet	3,083
Goalpara	4
Kamrup	191
Darrang	10
Nowgong	59
Sibsagar	61
Lakhimpur	22
Lushai Hills	22
North Cachar	22
Naga Hills	22

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SECTION IV.

RELIGION.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF POPULAR BELIEF.

The Khasis have a vague belief in a God the Creator, U *Blei Nongthaw*, although this deity, owing, no doubt, to the influences of the matriarchate, is frequently given the attributes of the feminine gender, cf., *Ka lei Synshar*. The Khasis cannot, however, be said to worship the Supreme God, although it is true that they sometimes invoke him when sacrificing and in times of trouble. The religion of the Khasis may be described as animism or spirit-worship, or rather, the propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions, principally in times of trouble. The propitiation of these spirits is carried out either by priests (*Iapyddok*), or by old men well versed in the arts of sorcerosery, and as the *Iapyddok* or wise men deals with good as well as evil spirits, and, as often as not, with the good spirits of ancestors, the propitiation of these spirits may be said to partake of the nature of Shamanism. A very prominent feature of the Khasi beliefs is the propitiation of ancestors; but this will be described separately. There is a vague belief amongst the Khasi of a future state. It is believed that the spirits of the dead whose funeral ceremonies have been duly performed, go to the house or garden of God, where there are groves of betel-nut trees; hence the expression for the departed, *ubo ioon kwai ha ding u blei* (he who is eating betel-nut in God's house), the idea of supreme happiness to the Khasi being to eat betel-nut uninterruptedly. The spirits of those whose funeral ceremonies have not been duly performed are believed to take the forms of animals, birds, or

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U Iaí longpah—the *god* of wealth. This *god* is propitiated with a view to obtaining increased prosperity.

U Syngkew, or a *Siem shrong*, is the tutelary deity of the village. This godling is propitiated by sacrifices whenever they are thought to be necessary.

U Thlen a *kyrpad* is a similar godling to the above.

There follows a list of minor deities, or, rather, evil spirits, *e.g. Ka Tih*, the malarial fever devil; *ka Khlem*, the demon of cholera; *ka Duba*, the fever devil which is said to haunt the neighbourhood of Thangkhat.

Rivet says "the Khasi religion may be thus briefly defined as forms used to cure diseases and to avert misfortunes, by ascertaining the name of the demon, as the author of the evil, and the kind of sacrifice necessary to appease it." We may accept this description as substantially correct. In the Jaintia Hills, there is a peculiar superstition regarding a she devil, called "*ka Tarah*," which is supposed to cause delirium in cases of fever. When such cases occur, it is believed that "*ka Tarah*" has caused them, and inquiries are made by means of breaking eggs to find out in whose person the demon has obtained a lodgment; or sometimes the sick person is asked to reveal this. When in either of these ways the name of the person possessed by "*ka Tarah*" is known, the sick person is taken to the house of the possessed, and ashes and bits of broken pots are cast into the enclosure, after which, if the sick person recovers, the party indicated is denounced as possessed by the demon; but if the patient dies, it is concluded that the person possessed has not been properly ascertained. If people are satisfied that some one is really possessed, they denounce the person, who is then out-casted. The only way for him to regain his position is to exorcise the demon by divesting himself of all his property." He pulls down his house, burns the materials, his clothes, and all his other worldly goods. Lands, flocks, and herds are sold, the money realized by the sale being thrown away. No one dares touch this money, for fear he should become possessed by *ka Tarah*. It will be observed that, as in the case of the *thlen*, the demon is believed to follow the property.

Mr. Jenkins, in his interesting little work on "Life and 000

It Gordon E-6, 1 (no date) 1907 ART Khasi ART

restored by the due propitiation of the offended spirits. In order to ascertain which is the offended spirit, a system of divination by means of cowries, breaking eggs, or examining the entrails of animals and birds, was instituted. The Khasi method of obtaining auguries by examining the viscera of animals and birds may be compared with that of the Roman haruspex. Some description of these modes of divination has been given at the end of this chapter. The Khasi religion has been described by Rivet as "demon worship or a jumble of enchantments muttered by priests who are sorcerers." But even a religion which is thus unfavourably described is based on the cardinal doctrines of sin and sacrifice for sin. Tradition amongst the Khasis states that in the beginning (*nongrymbong ka mpit*) there was no sin, heaven and earth were near each other, and man had direct intercourse with God. How man fell into sin is not stated, but it is certain that he did fall. Experts at "egg breaking" never forget to repeat the formula "*nga briéw nga ia pap*" (I man have sinned). The cock then appears as a mediator between God and man. The cock is styled "*u khún ka blei wba kit ryndang ka shah ryndang na ka hynta jong nga u briéw*," i.e. the son of god who lays down his neck (life) for our men. The use of the feminine *ka blei* is no doubt due to matriarchal influences. There is another prayer in which the Khasis say, "*ap jotang ne u blei ïong ranglah ne u briéw*" (oh god do not forget the covenant, arise oh man). The idea is that man has fallen into sin of omission and commission (*ia pap, ia kait ia bit*) but that God is nevertheless expected to spare him, and to accept a substitute for him according to the covenant (*jotang*). By this covenant God is supposed to have accepted in exchange the cock as a substitute for man. How the cock came to occupy such an important position, tradition is vague and self-contradicting. The fact remains that the covenant of the cock is the foundation of the Khasi religion. It is of interest to mention that amongst the Aborns the tradition is that Khunlong and Khunlái brought down from heaven the *lái-shán-mang*,* a pair of heavenly fowls, and that to this day the sacrifice of the

* In Aborn *lái* is fowl, *shán* is beautiful, *mang* is country. Therefore *Kiáshán-mang* is fowl of a beautiful country (heaven).

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fowl is considered by the Duolhais, or priest-soothsayers of the Khasis, a most important feature of the ancient Khasi ritual. But amongst the Khasis there is the difference that auguries are obtained, not from the entrails, but by examining the legs of the fowls. The Khasis are those belonging to the Tai branch, another great division of the Indo-Chinese group of the human race.

The movement of the cock as thus explained shows the importance of this sacrifice to the Khasis. The large intestine of a fowl has two pea-like protuberances, one close to the other. One is symbolically called u-lúi or god, and the other is styled u briéw or man, they are connected by a thin membrane. Directly the bird has been disembowelled the sacrificer throws a few grains of rice on the entrails and then watches their consecutive movements. If the portion of the entrail called u lúi moves towards that portion which represents man, it is considered good position that the god has heard the prayer of the sacrificer, but if the movement proceeds in the opposite direction, then the reverse is the case and the omen is bad. If the entrails are full and healthy, having no spots (lomi), or blood marks (thang), and if the membrane between the two protuberances has not been fractured, these are favourable signs. If the intestines are empty, wrinkled, or spotted, and the membrane mentioned above is fractured, these are bad signs. Auguries also are drawn by examining the livers, the lungs and spleens and gall bladders of pigs, goats, and cattle. If the liver of a pig is healthy and without spot, the augury is good; if the reverse, it is bad. The spleen must not be unduly distended, otherwise the omen is unfavourable and the gall bladder must not be over full. Inventions to deduce omens from the appearance of the entrails are quoted on page 11 of Col. Lister's Report. From the first invention quoted by him it appears that the method of drawing the augury from the fowl differs slightly in detail from that which has been described to me by certain Khasis, but both descriptions agree in the main, and the slight dissimilarity in detail may be due to the methods of obtaining auguries varying slightly in different localities. Divination by breaking eggs and by other means, although not strictly sacrifice with the Khasis, partakes

1:Gordon E-4, 9 (no date) 1907 ART Khasi ART

many say one belonging to your own kin, or clan. Unlike the Khasis, however, a Lyngam can marry two sisters at a time. The Lyngam marriages are arranged by beings or go-betweens, much in the same way as Khasi marriages; but the ritual observed is less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and Garo customs (see Section III.). The Lyngams intermarry with the Garos. It appears that sometimes the parents of girls elect bride-money, and marriage by capture have been heard of. Both of these customs are more characteristic of the Bodo tribes of the plains than of the Khasis. There are no special birth customs, as with the Khasis, except that when the umbilical cord falls a feast is mentioned, and the child is brought outside the house. Children are named without any special ceremony. The death customs of the Lyngams have been described in Section III. A peculiar characteristic is the keeping of the dead body in the house for days, sometimes even for several months, before it is burnt. The putrefying corpse inside the house seems to cause these people no inconvenience, for while it remains there, they eat, carry on their ordinary occupations, and sleep there, regardless of what would be considered by others an intolerable nuisance. The religion of these people consists of a mixture of ancestor-worship and the propitiation of the spirits of hill and fell, which are, most of them, believed to be of evil influence, as is the case with other savage races. As with the people of Nongstoin, the primeval ancestress, "*Ia Law-lei*," is worshipped for the welfare of the clan, a cow being sacrificed to her, with a gourd of rice-beer, and leaves of the oak, or *diengsning* tree. The leaves of the oak are afterwards hung up inside the house, together with the jaw-bone of the pig. Sacrifices are offered to a forest demon, *U Ringpang* (a god who brings illness), by the roadside; also to *Ka Mooey Bylli U Majpame*, the god of cultivation, at seed time, on the path to the forest clearing where the seed is sown. Models of paddy straw-houses, baskets and agricultural implements are made, and being used to indicate the grain. These are placed by the roadside, the skulls of the sacrificial animals and the feathers of fowls being hung up on bamboos about the place where the sacrifice has been performed. There are no priests or *Iyngdohs*, the fathers of the hamlet performing the various ceremonies.

2:Stegmiller-1 S-4,5(no date) 1921 ART Khasi ART

[507] The Religious Life of the Khasi

[520]

By P. F. Stegmiller, Apostolic Missionary, S.V.D., of Assam (India).

I. Religion in General

1. Gods, Spirits, Souls.
2. Methods of Warding Off Evil Spirits.
3. Taboos (sang).
4. Egg Throwing (shat-pylleng).
5. The Sacrifice of the Rooster (jinghnia sylar).
6. Discovering the Spirits that Need Appeasing (kheinkseid).
7. Prayer of Thanks after Receiving Good Health.

II. Religion in Various Phases of Life.

1. Giving a Name (tap lubri tap kyrteng).
2. Sacrifices during the Illness of a Member of the Family.
3. Sacrifices and Ceremonies at Death.
4. Cremation (ka jingthang).
5. Burial of the Bones.
   a) First Burial (maw shying).
   b) Second Burial (maw phew).
   c) Third Burial (maw bah).

I. Religion in General

1. Gods, Spirits, Souls.

173
771 An explanation about the origin of their religion is not to be expected from the Khasi themselves. Since they do not have a system of writing, nor idols or temples, one must turn entirely to their oral traditions.

772 must be appeased by throwing eggs. If the desired
[711] effect does not occur after the sacrifice has been offered, further information is sought by observing intestines (sacrifice of rooster), and the sacrifice is offered again. At least that is what is done for sickness. The other sacrifices will be described in more detail later.

• 771 114 The religion of the Khasi is one that arises from fear of misfortune and harm, and is active in the worship of (evil) spirits through sacrifice. This definition of mine corresponds essentially with the definitions of Sivar, (3) who

[713] 3. Sivar, Administration Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District of 1875.

says: "The Khasi religion may be briefly defined as a form to cure illnesses and to ward off misfortune, by finding out [710] the name of the devil who is the original cause of the evil and to appease him by sacrifices which are necessary," and Gurdon (4) "calls the Khasi religion a cult

[712] 4. Gurdon, The Khasi (London, 1907) p. 105.

of spirits, i.e., actually rather a reconciliation of spirits, good as well as bad, by sacrifices, which are offered occasionally, especially in times of distress."

Table of Summary

776 of several gods (good and evil) who are revered by the Khasi and the Synteng.

1. Good Gods:

u blei nongthaw, the creator god,
u 'lei longspah, the (good) god of wealth,

5:Stegmiller-Ia-...5(no date)196. 687Khasi687

Sacrifice and Sacrificial Customs of the Khasi by P.F. Stegmiller, S.J.S., Former Apostolic Missionary of Assam (India).

(With 6 Illustrations in the Text)

1. The Offerers of Sacrifices:

a) Lyngdoh,
b) Ceremonial introduction of the lyngdoh.

2. The Sacrifices:

a) State Sacrifices,
b) Private Sacrifices,
c) Secret Sacrifices

1. The Offerers of Sacrifices.

a) Lyngdoh.

The religion of the Khasi is an (evil) spirits worship, which has arisen out of fear of misfortune and harm and which is carried out by means of sacrifice. This definition of mine corresponds essentially with the definition of Rivar, (1) who says: "The Khasi religion may be briefly defined as a form to cure illnesses and to ward off misfortune by finding out the name of the devil, who is the original cause of the evil, and by appeasing him by the necessary, sacrifices. Gurdon (2) calls "the Khasi religion a cult of spirits, i.e., actually

1. Rivar, Administration Report of of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District of 1870.

2. Gurdon, The Khasi (London, 1906) p. 105.

• [70] 72 rather a reconciliation of the spirits, good as well as bad, by sacrifices, which are offered occasionally, especially in times of distress.*

Undoubtedly sacrifices belong to the practice of the Khasi religion. How who offers these sacrifices? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to differentiate between the various sacrifices that are customary among the Khasi. We find there

a) public sacrifices,
b) private sacrifices,
c) secret sacrifices,

The public sacrifices are performed by specially designated persons of the male sex (lyngdoh).

Private sacrifices can be performed by the ordinary men of the people as well as by sacrificers (lyngdoh) specifically designated for this.

Secret sacrifices are offered by anybody of the masculine or feminine sex.

72 73 The Khasi do not have priests in the actual sense of the word. There is also no caste or family from which the sacrificers would come. There is also no special school or training for beginning sacrificers. The sacrificers or lyngdoh have also no special mark of distinction. (3) To be a lyngdoh does not mean [73] having

). Cf. P. Dr. C. Becker, Indisches Kastenwesen und christliche Religion /Indic Caste System and Christian Religion/, (Aachen) p. 6.

a special profession. The sacrificers are ordinary people who may have any profession which they practice. Such men only appear occasionally as sacrificers. Even the chief sacrificers, who

the added explanations I am indebted to the Khasi missionary S.F. Dominikus Saundarer, S.V.D., who has been here many years and knows the language and who very kindly placed his experiences in this field at my disposal. 583

It should be noticed in general that the content of such extemporaneous verses has a religious slant and the language adheres to the mysterious method of expression of magic formulae and other formulae usual in the religious customs of the Khasi. Nevertheless, we may not seek for either secrets or magic in the following chant (jingphawar) just as the Khasi do not. The solo singer (u nongphawar) goes in front of the victorious team and begins: [777]. 526 538

1. U dieng-duh u kyndeh
The placing, the rice.
U sohkyrthit ia u pathaw.
The bar, the gourd.

2. To ngin khynnuh tyngeh.
Let us shake nightly.
Man shon shit la ka daw.
May our matter be in easy circumstances.

Then the rest shout, swinging their bows and stamping the earth: "ha, ha, hoi, hoi-hui!" [618]

3. Ka syrdeng u jasieh
The fence, the meadow.
Shi kynda ka kyndad.
Four moles.

4. To pynieng ka dieng ryntieh.
Let us place upright the wood of the bow.

8: Gurdon G-3 (no date) 1904 AR7 Khasi AR7

etc. The targets are of two kinds, i.e., a *shem*, which is made of a bundle of grass about 1 foot long and 4 inches in diameter, the target being fastened on to a pole; and from the root of a plant called *sohpdung*. The distance for the shooting is about 30 to 40 yards. 526

Before the shooting begins, a *nongkúr*, or sacrificer, performs a *puja* and then the shooting commences. Each archer subscribes from half to one anna, the total amount so obtained is pooled and then wagered against a similar sum subscribed by the other side. Whilst the shooting is going on the men of both sides dance and sing, and when there is a hit a great shout, or *kyrkoi*, is raised. The side that wins the match, after rewarding the *nongkúr* and the man who makes the targets, buys a pig, and some liquor, which articles are partaken of by the people of the village which has won the match. In the War villages, and amongst the Syntengs, sometimes wagers of considerable sums are made in lump sums in these contests.

II. It is not intended to describe at great length the Khasi religious system, but only to note briefly regarding it at present, a full account being reserved for the monograph for the preparation of which I am collecting further information. Khasi religion is animism, or spirit worship. It may be divided into (*a*) the worship of spirits, (*b*) ancestor worship. 771

(*a*) *Spirit-worship.*—The principal god amongst the Khasis is God the Creator (*U'lei Nongthaw*), who is sometimes masculine and sometimes feminine, the use of the feminine gender being no doubt due to matriarchal influence. A yearly sacrifice should be offered to this god of a cock and a goat. The cock is sacrificed as a substitute for man, it being thought that the cock, when killed, bears the sins of the man, and that by its sacrifice man will obtain redemption. How the cock came to occupy this important position in Khasi religion is not at present quite clear. Perhaps there were originally human sacrifices amongst the Khasis, and the cock nowadays takes the place of the human victim. Other gods which are worshipped are *Ka'lei long kur* (the goddess of the clan), *Ka'lei lumpyut* (the goddess of wealth), *U'lei um tung* (god of water). An important fact to be noted is that the Khasi gods or goddesses are never worshipped in the shape of idols in any form whatsoever. 776 782

(*b*) *Ancestor worship.*—I am inclined to think that this form of worship largely underlies the Khasi religious system. The following are some of the ancestors or ancestresses who are regularly worshipped:— 769

(1) *Ka Iawbei tynrem*,—the primeval ancestress of the family. A pig is sacrificed to her. 772

8: Gurdon G-3 (no date) 1904 AR7 Khasi AR7

769 (2) *U'meiñ nia*, —or departed maternal great-uncle.
(3) *U thaw lang*, —or departed great-grandfather.

824 771 A very striking feature of the Khasi religion is the use of the leaves of the *diepring* (*Q. lanceæfolia*) or Khasi oak tree. The leaves of this tree are used to cover the sacrifical knife, a sprig of the oak is implanted in the ground before the sacrifices of fowls or goats take place, an oak bough is hung up inside the house along with the jaw-bones and horns of sacrificed animals and the feathers of fowls. A great post of oak is to be found within the *arena* of the sacred residence of the Siem priestess of Khyrim, the custodian of the religion of the State of that name. Another feature is the use of altars of stone on certain ceremonial occasions, and no Khasi religious ceremony takes place without the use of a small gourd a *klong* from which libation are poured out to the gods. Dancing always accompanies ceremonies of any importance, *e.g.*, funeral ceremonies, the erection of memorial stones, and the great *puja* of the Siems of Nongkrem.

769 769 211 12. *Memorial stones.*—These are without doubt the most prominent feature connected with these people. The first thing that strikes any visitor to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills is the immense number of these stones. The latter are placed in a line, a higher one in the centre, and lower ones on each side. The centre monolith is occasionally covered with a round flat stone. The upright stones are always in uneven numbers, being in sets of three, five, seven, or even nine stones. In front of each set of three stones is placed one horizontal stone, or cromlech which rests on three or four small upright stones, the horizontal stone being raised to about one foot from the ground. If five upright stones are erected, two horizontal stones are placed in front of them, and if seven are erected three, and so on. There can be no doubt that these stones possess considerable significance, but what exactly that significance is I am at present engaged in investigating. As far as my information extends at present, I give the following explanation.

Memorial stones may be divided *for* the present into two classes—

(a) Stones erected by the family, or *kur*, in accordance with the Khasi custom of ancestor worship.
(b) Stones which are erected by children in honour of a deceased parent.

It should be remarked that both classes of stones are merely cenotaphs, the mausoleums of the ancestors or the parents often being nowhere near the places where the memorial stones are erected. Taking class (a) first: Supposing that five upright stones are erected and two horizontal stones as depicted in plate III. 2.

4/9 [see end plate 1 - - - - Analyst]

9: Godwin-Austen G-3 (no date) 1872 AR7 Khasi AR7

764 211 [483] I never saw the Khasis engaged in raising a stone into the upright position, but I saw the spars which had formed a sort of cradle on which the stones forming the monument erected by the Nongtariang clan previously alluded to had been dragged from the spot where they had been quarried. They consisted of strong curved limbs of trees roughly smoothed and rounded, and would present a very small surface to friction. These stones had been taken from the side of a hill near, and had apparently been wedged out of the face of a step in the exposed sand-stone strata.

It may be as well that I should here give some account of the funeral rites of the Khasis, which will show there is no connection between them and the monuments I have been describing, and with which the other stone erections have no doubt been often confounded. In their funeral rites there is much that is wonderfully strange, and to those unacquainted with their superstitions, appears unmeaning. There can be no doubt but 771 769 778 the Khasis have a very strong belief in a future state, and to say that they have no religion, as has been stated by some writers, is erroneous. True, they have no temples for either worship or idols, the religion of the people is principally a demon worship, and we find the Khasi ever in communion with or in the power, as he supposes, of the spirits of those who have gone before him. While, added to these spirits of their ancestors are numberless demons, male and female, ever ready, if not propitiated, to bring evil upon himself or his undertakings, and whose power even extends over the spirits of the dead. Every dark shady wood, every stream, every conspicuous hill, has its presiding demon, which in many instances gives the name to the site. Thus, the hill of LÄrû, in North Jaintia, beyond Nongjinghi, is the abode of a one-legged demon, whom to see is death, but who was occasionally heard in the dense forest that clothed the northern steep face of the mountain, so said the credulous villagers of Nongtäng.

764 The dead are burnt on a funeral pyre, the logs of which are arranged very regularly, and the body lies in a sort of bed formed by them.

The calcined bones and ashes are collected and placed in an earthen vessel (small "ghara"), and are generally buried in some adjacent spot, a stone being placed over the vase for security; they do not, however, remain permanently in this place. Every family or clan has a separate receptacle for these remains, constructed in several ways, but always covered with a heavy slab of stone: these receptacles are called "Mao-bah," the great stone "Mao-shiing," a bone depository—lit., the "bone stone."

M. Schlagintweit has fallen into an error regarding the dolmen-shaped structures, and was not aware that this form is so

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

CHAPTER II

VILLAGE COMMUNITY

As models of a Khasi village community, I have taken my data for the discussion presented in this chapter from two villages situated in the Kadashinong area, Sohkynduh and Kongton, with comparative data from Shella and Jatinga villages.

Sohkynduh and Kongton are situated in one of the most secluded spots of the Khasi Hills and the economy is shifting cultivation, with millet as its main product. Only a few Christians are found; most of the population are pagans. Shella is situated on the southern border of the Khasi Hills, adjacent to Pakistan. Jatinga is in the North Cachar Hills, surrounded by patrilineal tribes, such as the Zemi-Naga, the Kuki and the Cacharee. The economy of both villages is pan-leaf and orange cultivation. In Shella, Hindu, Christian and pagan are found among the villagers almost in the same proportions, while the Jatinga villagers are all Christian. The two Kadashinong villages, Shella and Jatinga, differ from one another not only in their religious and economic aspects, but in overt culture, dialect and political organization as well. (Additional information concerning Shella and Jatinga is given in Appendix.) Shella and Jatinga are unique among Khasi villages and quite sophisticated, having been developed under a trading economy, with considerable contacts with other peoples, including Hindus. I selected these villages in order to ascertain how far the structural principle which operates in the Kadashinong villages can be found to act also in totally different economic and environmental situations.

121 621 771 [101] [245] 184 621 121

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

some clerical work. However, such instances are very rare in these regions and few Christians are to be found among the people. So far as my genealogical table accounts for, only two boys from Sohkynduh, and one girl and one boy from Kongton, left for Shillong, and married there. In contrast to these exceptional cases in these villages, in the upland Khasi Hills, there are considerable changes in the composition of a village with high geographical and social mobility of population because of the spread of Christian education and urban influence.

The people of the two villages say that marriages with outside people were not formally practised, and were only a recent tendency. However, the composition of the population of the two villages showed extensive movements of population in the past (not to urban areas, but from village to village). Such movement is attributed mostly to migration by a family rather than by an individual on marriage. This type of migration is clearly found also in the process of the formation of Jatinga village (see Appendix, Jatinga).

The composition of the village community and the social characteristics of Sohkynduh and Kongton show very similar features of village endogamy. They seem to be typical of the traditional pattern of Khasi villages. Village endogamy is the intrinsic pattern among the Khasis. This fact can be also observed to a considerable degree in Shella and Jatinga.

[P. 116 is blank]

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

Shella

Confederacy forms a more marked endogamous community, through being cut off geographically and economically from the rest of the Khasi, and socially from the neighbouring Hindu people.

The Economy and the People.

Shella lies along the upper part of the Shella River and stretches upwards along the steep slope, looking down towards the Bengal plain. The climate of this part of the hills is considered to be one of the worst in tropical India for human habitation. The Bengal plain, though warmer than this area, is considered more healthy. This border land is the zone of malaria, typhoid, black fever, cholera, etc. None of the Bengalee peasants dare to live in such an area. However, it is the most fertile for products such as betel-nuts, pan-leaves, oranges, bananas and pineapples, and it also produces limestone. These people seem to prefer to settle in this zone and to enjoy its prosperity, at the expense of human lives: every year, especially between March and September, the inhabitants suffer from various fevers and dysentry and other diseaes, many of the weaker facing death.

Before the Partition of India and Pakistan, the products of Shella were carried down the Shella River to Sylhet, one of the biggest centres in East Bengal, which brought unimaginable wealth to the Shella people. Their houses were built by carpenters from Sylhet. The style and structure of these houses were exceptionally elaborate for the Khasi. They purchased vast rice fields in the plain, which used to be cultivated by Bengalee and Garo labourers engaged by them. These Khasi do not themselves know how to cultivate rice fields; they have always been managers or landowners. Their boys used to be sent to high schools and colleges in Sylhet. As a result of their trading with the Bengalee, many of them read and speak fluent Bengalee. There is no difference between their style of clothing and that of the Bengalee, though the women maintain their traditional dress in the Shella style.

They have thus been distinguished from the rest of the Khasi not only geographically, but also economically and culturally. Their personality also differs sharply from the rest of the Khasi. They are very sociable, and quick, a quality lacking among the Khasi of Sohkynduh and Kongton. They are clever enough to deal with strangers. The upland Khasi say Shella people are very cunning. This remark shows one side of these people. They had to be cunning, since they traded with the Sylhet Bengalee who were said to be the most cunning of their race. Their role in the trade and in the history of the modernization of the Hills was considerable. For centuries they represented intellectual Khasi owing to their contact with Hindu civilization, while the Hills remained in darkness. They assumed an important role when the British established an administration in the Hills, and even up to now, many leading Khasi originated from this area: for instance, Lati Hat, the first interpreter of the British Headquarters at Cherrapunjee; Jeebon Roy, who was the first Magistrate among the Khasi; Maham Sing, a lawyer and Member of the Legislative Assembly (the grandson of Jeebon Roy); Nichols Roy, Minister of Health and Prisons of the Assam Government, Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Missionary of the Church of God; R. R. Thomas (brother of Nichols Roy), Principal of the Gauhati University, etc.

Through constant cultural contact with Hindu, and encouraged by their economic prosperity, the Shella Khasi, like the Jaintias, have been much influenced by Hindu culture. However, this does not mean that the people of Shella adopted the Hindu beliefs. Though there is a small Hindu shrine, and some ceremonial elements were borrowed from the Hindu, most of the

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

177 people remained non-Hindu in their basic beliefs and social customs. Hindu
648 influences are nevertheless predominant in their culture, especially in their way
771 of living which shows a practical adaptability, somewhat similar to the Japanese
795 acceptance of modern western culture without becoming Christian. In my census of Shella village, the people calling themselves 'Hindu' amount to 40 per
[797] cent of the total, but they are the recent converts to the Ramakrishna School
[162] which established a missionary station at Shella after the Partition. The Christians constitute 30 per cent of the total, most of them having been converted during the last ten years, as in the case of the Ramachrishna School.[1]
[458] The rest remain as they were, of Khasi belief. These conversions to either Ramachrishna or Christianity seem to have been encouraged by the unstable situation of the people resulting from the recent economic depression in this area.

439 The Partition of India and Pakistan in August 1947, which drew the bor-
458 derline a few miles south of Shella village, considerably upset village economy by stopping all trade with Bengal, though a limited amount of trade is allowed
648 with local people at the border. Because of this political change, all the produce of Shella gardens is rotting away for lack of markets, while all of the rice fields were taken by Pakistan. Goods now come to Shella only from the uplands, carried upon men's shoulders over the most difficult pass, which makes everything very expensive. Many families have sold their gold and other treasures, and some families are facing starvation.[2]

182 Concerning the conversion to a new religion, an interesting phenomenon
171 is to be observed. The conversion to Christianity or to Ramakrishna is mostly by individual: I found in my census that the wife and husband often belong to
592 different religions. This is a very different picture from the Garo, among whom
613 I always found that the husband and wife belonged to the same religion: the conversion of the husband to Christianity was always followed by that of the
771 wife. I think this reflects the structural differences which influence the actual relationship between the husband and wife. Among these Khasi, instead of
795 the husband and wife, the maternal uncle and his nephews and nieces are mostly of the same religion. The function of the *iing*, the most important social and religious unit, thus appears also in the conversion to a new religion, stronger than that of a domestic unit.

Intermarriage.

648 The close economic and cultural contact of the Shella people and the Bengalee
771 is not matched by social contact. The essential barrier between the two peoples is the difference of religion which dominates the entire social order in each
563 society. Though these Khasi were important traders, richer than the neighbouring Hindu peasants, they were considered by the Hindu as outcasts with whom they never shared social activities. Intermarriages were therefore very rare. In Shella village, only two exceptional cases were found in my census:

1. A Khasi woman married to a Gurka (cattle-keeper); they live at Shella Bazaar (Sholap).
2. A Khasi woman has marital relation with a Bengalee medical doctor who has resided at Disong in Shella for six years. He already has a Bengalee

1. These two entirely different missionary activities are competing with each other, and are somewhat related to the political powers within this area.
2. The state government is doing its best to provide them with additional facilities: for example, providing air transport for the transportation of oranges from Shella to Gauhati and Calcutta. However, such arrangements cannot cover the great economic loss suffered by the Shella people.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

621 [Jatinga]

[175] This village was founded in 1905 by Khasi immigrants from the Jaintia Hills. [101] At the entrance of the village, a bust of the founder, Lakhanbang Suchiang, [211] stands facing towards the east; it was erected on the occasion of the celebration [346] of their Golden jubilee, in November 1955. Houses are scattered along the ridge of the moutain to the east and to the west; in the centre is the church. [771] All the inhabitants are Christians. Before the Partition this was one of the most modern and prosperous villages in Assam.

101 Jatinga provides a very interesting instance of the Khasi 'colonial' village. It is surrounded by villages of the Kuki, of the Zemi-Naga, and of the Cacharee, 121 who constitute the main population of the North Cachar Hills, and who are tribes entirely different from the Khasi, in economy, social organization, language 621 and culture. Therefore, Jatinga is like an island of Khasi community. I took this village as one of my fields, because I was particularly interested to discover how far the Khasi matrilineal organization is kept up in a community thus situated, surrounded by patrilineal tribes, and considerably modernized by Christianization and economic prosperity; and I was also interested in the process of formation of a new village, in comparison with Rinsibara and Joshipara in the Garo Hills.

Formation of the Present Population of Jatinga.

The first immigrants to Jatinga.

101 The main population of Jatinga, including the founder, originated in Bataw 166 village in the Jaintia Hills, twelve miles away from Jaintiapur, the capital of 175 the then Jaintia Rajas. This village is situated on the border of the Jaintia Hills and the East Bengal plain, the location being very similar to that of Shella, as are their culture and economy. In the later part of the nineteenth 621 century, some members of Bataw village moved to Borkhala, ten miles from Silchar, one of the biggest villages of the then Cacharee king.

These immigrants who came to Borkhala stayed there about fifteen years before they came to Jatinga. Kloribon, the first daughter of the founder's sister was born there. In November 1905, some Christian Khasi left Borkhala for Jatinga, acting on information gathered from a Welsh Mission at Haflong, that the land of present Jatinga was fertile and fit for their cultivation. They 166 were the first immigrants to Jatinga. The Government record names the following three persons as the first immigrants to Jatinga: Suchiang Lakhanbang, 551 Tariang, and Suchen Munik. In fact, according to the data which I collected 614 at Jatinga, Suchiang Lakhanbang was accompanied by the following persons (the names in brackets indicate the clans):

621 his wife, Misibon (Phanwar),[1]
175 his brother, Pryntah, and Pryntah's wife, Sintu (Rupsi),
his sister, Laptho, and Laptho's husband, Munik (Suchen) with their daughter, Kloribon, and Munik's younger brother, Sain.
his friend, Tariang.

Soon after their settlement, Sain, the brother of Munik, brought his wife Tahin (Suiam) from Jaintia. Misibon brought her younger sister, Diasibon. Tariang who came with Lakhanbang afterwards called his wife, Palong. But having spent some time there, they left eventually for another place, so that

1. Misibon was a native of the Cherrapunjee area of the Khasi Hills (not of Jaintia like the others). She was a school teacher at Cherrapunjee, and later became a teacher at a school near Jaintiapur, where she married Lakhanbang.

also active, and in that decade one U Kyrhai, a Khasi convert to Presbyterianism, left that church and founded a unique sect that blends something of himself with something of mystical Hinduism and Christianity. The competitors who most seriously threatened the dominance of the Welsh Presbyterians were the Roman Catholic missionaries who arrived in Shillong about 1890. Catholics have since opened a number of high schools, colleges, convents, and orphanages. They also established a technical school, and are now constructing a seminary. At the present time, one estimate is that there are about 100,000 Presbyterians and 80,000 Roman Catholics among Khasis. Members of other Christian sects are comparatively few; adherents to Hinduism and Islam are fewer still, comprised chiefly of Khasi women married to Hindu or Muslim men; U Kyrhai's sect is dying out; and the balance of Khasis are, according to their own term, "Khasi" in religion. [Cf. Lyngdoh 1937; Morris 1910; Ropmay 1940; Singh 1950; Pugh 1951.] **Supernaturals.** The great deities are two, an unnamed masculine God (U Blei) and an unnamed feminine Goddess (Ka Blei Nongsynshar Nonghukum). God created the earth, and in the beginning instructed man in cultivation techniques and also laid down the framework of a moral order that should guide his every move if he wished to join God in heaven after death. This framework was then filled in by the first ancestors, who are therefore the authorities on the subject and are semideified as Ka Iawbei (the mother), U Thawlang (the father), and U Suidñia (the mother's brother). Very early, Goddess undertook to keep account of the numbers of human beings on earth, and this role was so important, relating as it did to the health and the multiplication of the people, that she became of major importance in the Khasi pantheon. When sin beset human society, God activated automatic punishments in the form of natural calamities, and man finally decided that some animal should go and intercede with God on behalf of humans. The cock went, agreed to take upon himself the burden of human sin, and received instruction in the correct divinatory and sacrificial techniques for which he would be one of the main objects of the knife. Again, over a period of time, it was the ancestors who perfected these techniques. Now, God is regarded as powerful and merciful, but passive. His punishments have their own impetus, and the expression of His mercy is solidified in ritual. Goddess is more vaguely conceived, but is much closer to the individual. [But cf. Ehrenfels 1950, who conceives of one double-sexed, great deity among Khasis.] Regarding ancestors, it is never clear from prayers whether supplication is to generalized semideities or to particular first ancestors of a Khasi's own matrilineage, and such a distinction seems not to matter. There are three other categories of minor deities: those who protect places (such as villages, groves, or springs),

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household deities, and measles and smallpox deities. 776
Deities of the first two categories are simply aspects 771
of the high God or Goddess. • The earth is peopled with two great orders of land demons and water demons who cause all undesirable, unnatural, and otherwise inexplicable events, acting either on their own or as instruments in the hands of sorcerers. Apart from omens, both in nature and in dreams, 787
Khasis attach supernatural significance also to mystic 822
numbers, and to the colors white, black, and red. They hold especially important folk beliefs regarding 824
betel nut, paddy rice, gold and silver, and clothing.
Practitioners. The two classes of religious practition- 791
ers are the village or state priests and the sacrificers. 793
Both are male. They use the same divinatory tech- 754
niques of reading broken eggshells and the entrails of cocks, and they both sacrifice cocks, hens, goats, pigs, and cattle. Their skills are not taught to them so much as picked up by observation and confirmed by demonstrations of efficacy. A priest is elected from among the men of his sib to direct his skills to the public good until he dies, and his rewards are institutionalized and come from the village or the state. A sacrificer acts for private persons or kin groups, on call, and is rewarded by them personally with gifts in cash or in kind. The sacrificer is called upon to explain and then to ritually remedy every variety of misfortune, especially illness, though his powers are nowadays regarded with ambivalence, and he is widely expected to become a sorcerer sooner or later. • There are two major types of sor- 754
cerer. One is the ritual specialist or sacrificer who secretly turns his skills from good to evil, manipulating demons to injure a person or kin group, and acting always for himself alone out of considerations of jealousy or revenge. The other is normally a leading citizen, a woman who is so wealthy and successful that it is believed that she must keep a *thlen*, i.e. a creature which will bring her prosperity as long as she feeds it periodically with human blood. To provide this blood, the men of her household, or other males whom she bewitches with a special whisky, will indiscriminately murder anyone except a mem- [184]
ber of her matrilineage. The Jaintias have an analogue to the *thlen* in their *taro*, except that the ultimate result is death from illness rather than murder. Minor witchcraft can be perpetrated by poison keepers or persons with an evil eye, who are often women. **Ceremonies.** The important traditional 843
ceremonies were the life-crisis rituals relating to 844
pregnancy and childbirth, the naming of a child, and 553
death. Lesser ceremonies related to marriage and 764
divorce, and to housebuilding. All these rituals were 585
addressed primarily to the ancestors, and they are 586
still performed in modified form by many Khasis. 342
Other rituals, which were performed by groups such 769
as villages, sibs, local descent groups, or households, 178
were addressed to the unnamed aspects of the high 782

17: Banerjee E-5 (1955) 1962 AR7 Khasi AR7
Smit

THE KHASI FESTIVAL OF 'POMBLANG'

S. BANERJEE

INTRODUCTION

The Khasi inhabit the upland of the central part of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam. They reckon descent through mother and the youngest daughter (Ka khadduh) of the house is the custodian of the ancestral property. Belief in the existence of spirits is strong among them and the causes of diseases are ascertained by taking recourse to the process of divination. They are ruled by different categories of Chief. The *Siem* is the highest official responsible for the administration of the state but a few small states are also governed by *Sirdars* with same powers as vested in the former although does not possess the same status. It is interesting to note that their priest whose rank is next to *Siem*, have also been allotted to perform this secular duties in some of the regions of the Khasi country. The Chief function through their respective council comprising elected members from different administrative units. He is rather subservient to this body as he is liable to be censured or even dismissed, if his activities are not in conformity with the Khasi traditional usage. Most of his directives are implemented through the assistance of his subordinates who are in-charge of various sections of the State. The Khasi place his grievance first to these junior officers for redress and justice, after which an appeal can be preferred to the *Siem* or any other higher officer as the case may be. One of the eminent States of the Khasi people known as Khyriem, where this festival is celebrated, consists of eight units for administrative convenience under the supervision of different grades of officials who participated in this celebration along with the *Siem* as representatives of the people.

The Khasi festival of *Pomblang* (Goat killing) described below used to be celebrated at one time in Shillong when the Khasi states of Khyriem and Mylliem were not separated. The first chief of the Khyriem state U Singh Manik shifted his headquarters to Nongkrem village after partition of the kingdom, which occured before the arrival of the British. He again moved to Lankerdem after a brief stay at the village of Lyngshing. He performed this festival as long as he was there, transferring it again to Nongkrem where he re-settled again. It was celebrated here for a long time and consequently it was named after this village. Although the ruling family had later on shifted its residence about sixty years ago to the present village Smit, during the time of U Klur Singh, Siem, it is performed regularly as *Nongkrem dance* which was observed by the author from 21st June to 25th June, 1955.

OBJECT OF THE FESTIVAL

It is being held every year since the days of U Shillong who was supposed to be the founder of original Khyriem State. They celebrate it to perpetuate his memory and pay homage with a view to ensure rain, good harvest, eliminating diseases and famine. He was worshipped along with other ancestors with view to guide the present Chief in his discharge of his duties and for the welfare of the people.

The house of Siem (iing-sad) where the rites are observed, is considered sacred. It consists of a big-hall (shlur) in the centre, surrounded by rooms. One of these on the north is used as a kitchen room (iing-chetja) where ritual

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

593 wedlock goes to the wife and becomes her property; but all other
428 property is inalienable, and reverts to his family, as also does his corpse after death.

771 'RELIGION.—The religion of the Khásiás is demon-worship, or a jumble of enchantments muttered by priests who are sorcerers. They invoke evil spirits as the deputies of God and the instruments
775 of His pleasure or displeasure. The Khásiás believe in metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls. After death, human beings are transformed into monkeys, crabs, tortoises, frogs, etc. Though a future state is not denied, it is treated with absolute indifference, as beyond the sphere of responsibility; all rites, ceremonies, and observances bear reference to the welfare of mankind in this world. The spirits of their departed relatives and ancestors are invoked only in so far as they are considered to influence and have power
764 over the present life. The Khásiás burn their dead, and collect the ashes into urns, which are kept under a slab raised on four others enclosing a space. These monuments are of various kinds and sizes —one for individuals, another for a family, and another for a whole
614 clan. There is no caste system, but each clan is called after some object of nature, as the Oak clan, the Crab clan, etc., and these names entail certain restrictions beyond which intermarriage is
771 forbidden. The Khási religion may be briefly described as the practice of forms to cure diseases, and to avert misfortunes of all kinds, by means of ascertaining the name of the demon who is the author of the evil, and the kind of sacrifice necessary to appease it.

797 'CHRISTIANITY.—The Welsh Mission has been labouring amongst the Khásiás and Syntengs for thirty-two years. The Christians number about 1000 [according to the Census of 1872, the total number of native converts in the District is only 85]. There are four central stations—Cherrá, Shellá, Shillong, and Jowái —and twenty-three churches. Translations of the whole of the New Testament, and a portion of the Old, are now (1876) going to press, besides other religious books.

197 'LANGUAGE.—The definitions generally given of monosyllabic
193 languages are far from adequate to enable us to assign to the Khási tongue its position amongst the Indo-Chinese family of speech. Still, in the absence of a better terminology, it may be described as monosyllabic in the agglutinative stage. The monosyllabic element greatly predominates. By far the larger number of the compounds are mere agglutinations (in a modified

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

In the interior of the Hills the largest villages are mere clusters of huts. The great majority of the inhabitants are employed in agriculture, but there are no data upon which a proportion of agriculturists to non-agriculturists could be based.

There is no immigration into the District. Both the Khásiás and the Syntengs have been successful in preserving to the present day their primitive isolation, free from the interference of Hinduism. They still maintain their aboriginal forms of belief and religious worship, and repudiate alike the authority of Bráhmans and the entire system of caste. To some extent, however, they have given way to Hindu prejudices in the matter of purity of food. The few Hindus to be found in the Hills are temporary residents, engaged in civil and military employ, who always contemplate returning to their own homes. The traders are for the most part natives of the Hills; for the Márwárí merchants, who penetrate into every other corner of Assam, have been able to obtain no footing in the face of Khásí competition. There is likewise no emigration from the District. The hillmen are a well-to-do and contented race, and either produce themselves or obtain by trade sufficient to satisfy their scanty wants. A certain number of both Khásiás and Syntengs proceed southwards every year to work on the tea gardens of Cáchár and Sylhet, but such absence from home is only temporary.

AGRICULTURE: RICE.—Thirteen different varieties of rice are cultivated in the District, of which the following is a list, giving the Khásí name as well as the description of the grain:—(1) *U-kyba-khynriam* (*u*, the masculine article, meaning 'the,' and *kyba*, noun masculine, meaning 'paddy'), brown rice with long grain; (2) *u-kyba-khynriam bai-lih*, a white rice with long grain; (3) *u-kyba la-toh*, round-grained rice; (4) *u-kyba ksai*, bearded, husked; (5) *u-kyba-dew-ba-iong*, black husked rice (literally *u*='the,' *kyba*='paddy,' *dew*='earth,' *ba*='that,' *iong*='black'); (6) *u-kyba-ba-lih*, white rice; (7) *u-kyba-seim*, scented rice (literally *u*='the,' *kyba*='paddy,' *seim*='royal'); (8) *u-kyba la-krok*, large-grained rice; (9) *u-kyba-ba-tlang*, small-grained rice; (10) *u-kyba sa-bia*, early rice; (11) *u-kyba ra-bon*, late rice; (12) *u-kyba tang-la*, rice grown along with beans; (13) *u-kyba-ba-túh*, small rice.

Rice is cultivated in marshy fields situated near running water as well as in high lands. The first seven of the above thirteen species of rice are sown in marshy lands during the months of April and May,